
April 2015

Ten Lakes Travel Management Proposed Action

USDA Forest Service
Kootenai National Forest
Fortune Ranger District



View of Stahl Peak
Photo by Laura Jungst

Travel Management Proposals Including:

- * Over-snow
motorized use
- * Non-winter trail
management

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Introduction

The Fortine Ranger District of the Kootenai National Forest (KNF) has developed a proposed action for the Ten Lakes Travel Management Plan. The project area is located north and east of Eureka, Montana and includes 64,177 acres. The project boundary contains the Ten Lakes Wilderness Study Area (WSA) but is larger than the study area to capture common entrance points to the WSA. The project boundary was drawn on existing road and boundary lines. Although, the analysis boundary contains some private land, proposals are for National Forest System Lands only. The legal description of the project area includes all or portions of Townships 35, 36, and 37 North, Ranges 24, 25, 26, and 27 West, Lincoln County, Montana. A map of the activity area is enclosed.

This area contains the Ten Lakes Montana Wilderness Study Area, Ten Lakes Scenic Area, Ten Lakes Inventoried Roadless Area and Ten Lakes Contiguous Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRA), Ten Lakes Recommended Wilderness Area, Therriault Pass Geological Area and a small portion of the Tuchuk IRA.

Background

In 1977, Congress passed the Montana Wilderness Study Act designating the Ten Lakes Wilderness Study Area. The act requires the Forest Service to administer these acres to “maintain their presently existing wilderness character and potential for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System, meaning the Forest Service must maintain

the character that existed in 1977 when the Act was passed.

A 2007 lawsuit settlement agreement with the Montana Wilderness Association commits the Forest Service to develop summer and winter travel plans for the Ten Lakes Wilderness Study Area. While some of this proposal was included in the scoping package for the Galton project, the Forest Supervisor decided that travel management merits its own analysis process and has split it from the previous project. Thus, we have chosen to re-scope the proposed action for this area as Ten Lakes Travel

Management. During prior efforts for the Galton project, a great deal of valuable information was gained from the public. This information has been and will continue to be used along with information gained during analysis of Ten Lakes Travel Management.

Existing Condition

Since the settlement agreement, the Kootenai National Forest has established the Motor Vehicle Use Map (commonly called a MVUM) to designate motor vehicle use on roads, trails, and areas across the forest. This project does not propose any changes to the Motor Vehicle Use Map. This project only addresses travel management within the established project area.

Over-Snow Vehicles

Currently the entire Ten Lakes WSA is open to over-snow motor vehicle use and there are no restriction dates on that use. Long-time snowmobile users in the area have provided information that indicates there

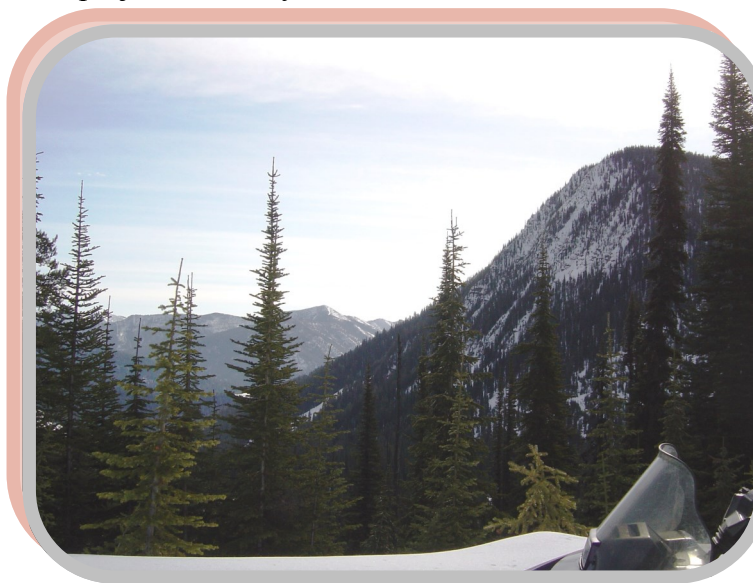


Photo: View of Ten Lakes in Winter By Pat Price

are very few places they go now that they didn't go in 1977. New technology has provided over-snow motor vehicles that are capable of travelling further and in less optimal conditions than previous over-snow vehicles. There is anecdotal evidence of the use of the Ten Lakes WSA and documentation of trends in general snowmobile use at the county, state, and national level. There is limited site specific information on use that was occurring in the WSA in 1977. Use has likely increased since that time.

The Ten Lakes Snowmobile Club currently grooms approximately 35 miles of road, open yearlong to motor vehicle use, for snowmobiling outside of the WSA under a Challenge Cost Share Agreement (FS Agreement Number: 13-CS-11011400-004). Grooming was done intermittently in 1982 and 1983.

A Challenge Cost Share Agreement was established in 1990. This agreement was reissued on 12/3/2012 and is effective through June 30, 2017. The club may begin trail grooming on or after December 1 when there is adequate snow conditions. No grooming is allowed after April 1. No grooming occurs in the WSA.

There is an active SNOTEL weather station and snow course on Stahl Peak that is accessed for maintenance and measurement purposes by over-snow vehicles during the winter months. This lies just outside the WSA.

Mechanized Use

Mountain bikes are non-motorized pedal bicycles built for use on mountainous terrain and mountain trails. Mountain bikes are considered mechanized use. Forest Service direction (FSM 2329.3d) only allows mountain bike use in Wilderness Study Areas

on the same number of miles of trail that allowed motorcycle use in November of 1977. No trails are currently specified exclusively for or preclude mechanized use.

Non-Winter Motorized Use

Since the settlement agreement, the Kootenai National Forest has established the Motor Vehicle Use Map (commonly called a MVUM) to designate motor vehicle use on roads, trails, and areas across the forest. There are currently 106 miles of existing National Forest System Road in the project area. Of those miles, 2 miles are open seasonally, 62 miles are open yearlong, and 42 miles are restricted yearlong per forest motor vehicle use map. A portion of one road, Road 7077 (0.8 miles), is within the WSA.

Road 7077 is open seasonally (July 1 – November 30).

Desired Condition

The desired condition for the Ten Lakes WSA is to maintain the wilderness character and the potential for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System that existed in 1977 when the Montana Wilderness Study Act of 1977 (Public Law 95-150) was passed.

Kootenai National Forest Plan

This proposed action complies with the 2015 Kootenai National Forest Plan. In that plan, this area has several overlapping management areas (MA). The plan states that the direction for MA1c takes precedence for those areas within the MA1c boundary. The majority of the remainder of the area is designated as MA5b (Backcountry – Motorized Year Round) with a small portion of MA 5a (Backcountry – Non-motorized Year Round) and a small portion of MA6 (General Forest).



Photo: Mountain Biker on Trail By Traci Swope

Table 1 2015 KNF Plan Management Areas in Ten Lakes Travel Management

Management Area	Acres
MA 1c (Ten Lakes Wilderness Study Area)	34,092
MA 1b (Ten Lakes Recommended Wilderness)*	26,000
MA 3 (Special Areas – Ten Lakes Scenic Area and Therriault Pass Geologic Area)**	15,438
MA 5a (Backcountry – non-motorized year round)	2,955
MA 5b (Backcountry – motorized year round)	23,127
MA 6 (General Forest)	3,761

*The Ten Lakes Recommended Wilderness acres are derived from the 1985 Legislative Report to Congress. MA1c direction takes precedent.

**MA 3 acres overlaid on other MAs.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of this project is to develop a travel management plan (winter and summer) for the Ten Lakes Wilderness Study Area to comply with the terms of the 2007 Settlement Agreement with the Montana Wilderness Association and to maintain wilderness character and the potential for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation system that existed in 1977 (MA1c-DC0AR-01).

Proposed Action

The interdisciplinary team has developed a proposed action that includes summer and winter travel management. This includes over-snow vehicle travel, non-winter trail management (mechanized and non-mechanized), and non-winter motorized travel.

Photo: Pack String By Marcy Goheen

Over-Snow Vehicle Travel

The proposed action for over-snow vehicle travel contains two distinct seasons. Season 1 (December 1 – March 31) proposes to allow over-snow vehicle travel on 36,703 acres and 12.5 miles of designated over-snow motorized routes. Approximately 15,838 of those acres are within the WSA. This would allow motorized over-snow vehicle travel to occur on 46 percent of the acres within the WSA. Approximately 0.7 miles of designated route fall within the WSA. Season 2 (April 1 – May 31) proposes to allow over-snow vehicles on 4,446 acres and 32.9 miles of designated motorized over-snow vehicle routes. Approximately 2,980 acres are within the WSA. This would allow motorized over-snow vehicle travel to occur on nine percent of the acres within the WSA. Please see attached maps for a visual representation of the proposed over-snow vehicle travel.



Non-Winter Trail Designations (Mechanized and Non-Mechanized)

Northern Region Forest Service Manual Supplement No. 2300-2008-1, section 2329 (Management of Wilderness Study Areas) states that that mountain bikes

may be allowed on trails that had established motor bike use in 1977, or on other non-motorized trails as long as the aggregate amount of mountain bike use maintains the wilderness character of the WSA as it existed in 1977 and maintains potential for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. In 1977, 17.3 miles of trails in the area that would become the WSA were open to motorized vehicles yearlong. Thus, manual direction could allow for some mechanized use in the WSA.

This proposal includes 9.3 miles of trail available for mechanized use within the WSA (Gibraltar - 6.6 miles, Cat – 2.7 miles. The portion of the Blacktail trail proposed for mechanized use is not within the WSA.) Please see Table 2 for proposed non-winter trail designations.

Non-Winter Motorized Access

There are no changes proposed to any existing non-winter motorized access currently designated on the Kootenai National Forest's motor vehicle use maps. As stated previously, there are currently 106 miles of existing National Forest System Road in the project area. Of those miles, two are open seasonally, 62 are open yearlong, and 42 are restricted yearlong.

Timelines

A decision for this project is expected by winter of 2015.

Attached maps show each of the proposals.

Table 2 Non-Winter Trail Management Proposals

Trail Name	Trail #	Total Miles	Miles in WSA	Allowed Uses	
				Stock Hiking	Mech-anized Stock Hiking
Foundation/Camp	77	10.0	3.5	10.0	
Clarence/Rich	78	4.5	2.4	4.5	
Stahl Creek	80	2.0	0.4	2.0	
Stahl Peak	81	5.0	1.8	5.0	
Clarence Ness	82	2.4		2.4	
Bluebird	83	1.9	1.6	1.9	
Wolverine Lakes	84	3.5	3.2	3.5	
Little Therriault Lake Loop	85	1.0		1.0	
Big Therriault Lake Loop	86	1.5	>0.1	1.5	
Therriault Pass	87	1.3	1.1	1.3	
Sinclair Creek	88	4.1	4.1	4.1	
Rainbow	89	4.5	3.5	4.5	
Blacktail	92	8.6	0.9	2.0	6.6
Big Therriault/Highline	190	0.9	0.8	0.9	
Horse Camp	306	0.3		0.3	
Miistakiistsi	308	1.0		1.0	
Cat Creek	333	3.2	2.7		3.2
Gibraltar Ridge	335	9.8	8.7	3.2	6.6
Highline	339	15.2	15.1	15.2	
Indian Ck	340	3.5	3.5	3.5	
Little Therriault/Highline	341	0.5	0.2	0.5	
Otter Creek	554	0.6		0.6	
Weasel Lake Accessible	557	0.1		0.1	
Horse Camp/Highline	560	0.5		0.5	
Totals		85.9	53.5	69.5	16.4

*Trail miles were calculated using GIS and were recently updated. On the ground mileage may vary.



